Bringing Theory to Practice Annual Report
Demonstration Site Program
August 1, 2011

1. **Grantee:** Wagner College

2. **Project title:** Identifying and Assessing the Relationships Between Models of Experiential Learning/Civic Engagement, Student Psycho-Social Well-Being and Persistence toward Graduation.

3. **Project team members:**
   a. **Project director and contact information :** Lily McNair, Ph.D., Provost and VP, Academic Affairs, Wagner College, One Campus Road, Staten Island, NY 10301. Phone: 718-390-3221; E-mail: lily.mcnair@wagner.edu

   b. **Project evaluator and contact information**

      Anne Goodsell Love, Ph.D., Associate Provost for Assessment: expertise in assessment and learning communities

      Amy Eshleman, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Department of Psychology: expertise in research design and statistical analysis of data.

   c. **Additional team members and roles**

      Patricia Tooker, Dean for Integrated Learning: oversees all learning communities and civic engagement, through which most of the assessment is taking place.

      Ruta Shah-Gordon, Assistant Vice President for Campus Life: oversees all Campus Life activities and the related assessment tools (CORE, Quality of Life survey)

      Cass Freedland, Ph.D., Director, Center for Leadership and Service: facilitates civic engagement activities across campus and community.

      New Member as of fall 2012: Katia Gonzalez, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Department of Education and faculty Scholar, Center for Teaching, Learning and Research: responsible for faculty development and dissemination.

4. **Project summary and major objectives**
   Wagner College is distinguished by an innovative and successful undergraduate curriculum, assessment strategies and community engagement. Wagner College will further transform the student experience by systematically assessing its existing models of experiential learning/civic engagement in relation to student psychosocial well-being and persistence toward graduation.

Goals include:

1. Identify the relationships among and between different models of experiential learning/civic engagement at Wagner College with student psychosocial well-being and persistence toward graduation.

2. Use this data analysis to guide a strategic plan for curriculum adjustment, co-curricular activities, and student support services with the goal of creating a more transformative educational experience for all undergraduate students.

3. Provide continuous assessment of the project goals and implementation of the strategic plan (developed during goal number two) which will lead to campus-wide sustainability of efforts and activities.

4. Assess the alumni reported "feelings of connection" to Wagner College in relation to their experiential learning activities while they were students at Wagner College.

5. **Project activities to date**
   a. Identify special program activities of which we should be aware.

   I. Presentations On and Off-Campus:
   1. **AAC&U Annual Conference, San Francisco, January 2011**

   Bringing Theory to Practice: The Role of Experiential Learning for Student Success in a Global Society

   Presentation description: "This interactive session will include panelists from two institutions selected as demonstration sites for the Engelhard Foundation-supported project Bringing Theory to Practice. They will discuss how their campuses designed the projects and are collecting data about the relationships among high-impact pedagogy, civic engagement/experiential learning, and student psychosocial well-being. Participants will have ample opportunity to share best practices from their campuses."

   Presenters were: Amy Jessen-Marshall, Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs, Dean of University Programs, Otterbein University; Devorah Lieberman, Provost, Vice President for Academic Affairs, and Anne Love, Associate Provost for Assessment and Dean of Academic and Career Development—both of Wagner College

2. **Engaged Learning, Civic Development, and Student Psychosocial Well-being, Wagner College FYP and ILC Faculty Retreat, May 16-17, 2011**

The information below was presented to approximately 35 faculty members at the end of the year retreat. Due to time constraints, there was very limited discussion of the information. An excerpt of the information is given below.

Our initial thinking in the BTtoP project focused on different models of experiential learning (field trips, civic engagement, or a combination of the two – a "hybrid"), but in asking questions about those learning experiences, other questions arose about a broader range of factors that might influence student learning. During the fall semester the FYP faculty were asked about:

- faculty communication with site coordinators prior to the start of the course
- student orientation to the site(s) and who does it
- the specific activities done as a part of the experiential component of the course
- when or how faculty members accompanied students to the site(s)
- how faculty members communicate to students the learning objectives for the experiential component of the course
- how students are grouped for their experiential learning

This data had not been analyzed by the time of this retreat, so only preliminary data was distributed. It did not showing any strong relationships between variables.

Questions for discussion – this is a thinking exercise!
- What preliminary patterns do you see in these data?
- What hypotheses would you propose for testing, based on these data?
- What questions do these preliminary data bring up?
- What other information would we need to collect in order to answer other questions?
- What other comments or speculation do want to share?

3. **BTtoP Retrieval Conference Washington, DC, June 2011**

Civic Engagement and Psychosocial Well-Being panel

What are the relationships between civic engagement and the psychosocial well-being of students, and vice versa? What benefits derive from strengthening their relationships on the campus? Why should we, or anyone, care?

Panelists: Michelle Boyd, Tufts University, Cass Freedland, Wagner College, and Richard Kendrick, Director of the Center for Civic Engagement & Professor of Sociology, SUNY-Cortland.

II. *Site Visit:*
A significant programmatic activity took place February 28-March 1, 2011 in the form of a national site visit. Stakeholders from across the campus met with Ashley Finley, Barry Checkoway and Jennifer O'Brien throughout the day. The following ideas and questions were generated:

- ○ What is the meaning of "connectedness" as it pertains to undergraduate students and alumni, with particular interest paid to the hallmark First Year Program and its ability to transform our students over both the short- and long-term?

- ○ What are the overlaps between service and civic action?

- ○ There was interest in the development of a common language to describe our work across campus; this language could frame the exploration of civic engagement and well-being through multiple lenses, adaptable to the needs of various constituencies.

- ○ What do these data mean for the development or refinement of effective teaching and learning practices?

6. **Project accomplishments to date**

A. Progress in Meeting Our Proposed Objectives:
The 2010 proposal delineated eight objectives for this 2-year project:

1. Wagner College will have identified, across the curriculum, three distinct models of experiential learning/civic engagement

2.   Wagner College will have identified and assessed the relationships between models of experiential learning/civic engagement, student psychosocial well-being, levels of student connectedness to the College, levels of student persistence toward graduation

3.   Campus wide dialogues will have occurred which address the variables and findings above

4.   Curricular adjustments will have been suggested/addressed based on the findings from the research

5.   Co-curricular activities will have been suggested (some implemented) based on the research findings

6.   On-going research will have been designed to continue the project, the research, and the ongoing curricular and co-curricular adjustments

7.   On-going analysis will continue of alumni connectedness to Wagner College and their experiential learning activities during their tenure as students.

8.   Faculty and administrators will have published and presented the project findings on the campus, at national conferences, and in the higher education literature

In the first year of the Bringing Theory to Practice initiative, the assessment team has made tremendous strides in cataloging the types of experiential learning taking place within the first year program (Objective 1). While our initial focus was on three models of experiential learning (high civic engagement, field trips and a hybrid of these two), as the year progressed we turned our attention to the individual elements of each learning community experience (communication modes, site orientation, whether students travel in groups, whether the faculty members travel with their students), and will use these data to isolate successful practices evident in learning communities, regardless of their "model." This will afford a more flexible entry point into our investigation of civic engagement and well being, and will broaden our understanding of how existing systems and programs relate to (or don't relate to) the issues of experiential learning/civic engagement, student psychosocial well-being, levels of student connectedness to the College, levels of student persistence toward graduation (Objective 2).

B. Progress in Data Analysis, 2010-2011:

To begin to understand the utility of our current assessment tools and whether they can guide the establishment of key learning outcomes, the Experiential Learning Survey results from Fall 2009 and Spring 2010 were analyzed. These surveys did not include

questions associated with psychosocial well-being, but served as an important foundation for our future refinement of the survey for the 2010-2011 academic year. Five groupings of experiential learning were identified:

- The High Civic Engagement, FYP group consisted of nine First Year Program Learning Communities that were part of the Civic Innovations Program.

- The Moderate Civic Engagement, FYP group consisted of eight First Year Program Learning Communities that engaged in moderate levels of civic engagement through experiential learning.

- The Low Civic Engagement, FYP group consisted of five First Year Program Learning Communities that focused on experiential learning, such as field trips, with a low level of civic engagement.

- The Civic Innovations group consisted of ten courses within the Civic Innovations program (Spring 2010 semester).

- The Senior Learning Community group consisted of six Senior Program Learning Communities plus one additional student from a seventh learning community in that program.

Responses from students in Fall 2009 First Year Program Learning Communities that were determined to be high or moderate in civic engagement and students in Spring 2010 Civic Innovations courses were included in a factor analysis. The following categories were identified:

- Personal Growth Through Experiential Learning (Items 13 – 18)

- Academic Growth Through Experiential Learning (Items 8 – 12, 19)

- Previously Volunteering (Item 7)

- Links Between Community Work and Learning Outcomes (Items 20, 28 – 33)

- Sense of Connection to Community Partner (Items 21 – 26)

- Future Intention to Volunteer/Participate (Item 27, reverse scored)

In fall 2010, the survey was expanded to include the Hope Scale and the Flourishing Scale. This created a long assessment tool, but it has allowed the BTtoP team to develop a baseline data set that would serve as a bridge between the old and refined (and greatly scaled down) survey. We also developed a questionnaire for faculty in the freshman learning communities that breaks down the academic and civic elements of each course more thoroughly. Faculty members were asked to elaborate on the connections between their experiential learning components and the course material, the frequency of their communication with the host site, the configuration of student visitation to these sites (in

groups, individually), and the ways in which students reflect upon their experiences. In this way, we are now able to examine the student survey results in light of different experiential learning pedagogies.

Highlights of the results of the faculty survey and student survey in the First Year Program in Fall 2010 are listed below:

- On average, students seemed to have healthy psychosocial well-being in terms of the Hope Scale (both on the Pathways and Agency measures) and in terms of emotional and psychological well-being. Social well-being was moderate and may suggest an issue about which to raise awareness among faculty. Contrary to prediction, models of experiential learning did not predict responses to measures of psychosocial well-being.

- Most learning communities provide a high amount of orientation by the faculty members and by the site to the experiential learning, but there still seems to be room for improvement here. Connection of the experiential learning to the Reflective Tutorial (RFT) is strong.

- Results for communication of learning objectives showed that medium levels were associated with a higher sense of connection to the community partner than low levels of communication of learning objectives. High levels of communication of learning objectives did not show a statistically significant difference. This pattern did not seem meaningful or informative and may be driven by other aspects of the specific learning communities rather than by the model of experiential learning.

In spring 2011, the expanded survey was distributed to all Senior Learning Communities, as well as in classes linked to a high degree of community engagement. Not all capstone courses have civic components, but by this point in their academic career, all students would have experienced multiple forms of experiential learning as a result of the Wagner Plan. Thus, surveying all seniors in the spring semester will allow the assessment team to broaden its understanding of how our students have or have not embraced civic engagement while at Wagner College. The results of this survey are pending.

7. Provide an example that expresses the essence or core of your project - something that you want others to know.

The BTtoP initiative has been a topic of discussion inside the Wagner community for the past year. We have presented project goals and preliminary findings to faculty, administration and staff, and are in the process of expanding our assessment team. While we work diligently within

our institution to create a sustainable atmosphere for this important self-examination process, we sometimes lose perspective as to how much cross-departmental communication is occurring.

A few months ago, at a regional NYMAPS (The New York Metro Area Partnership for Service-Learning) meeting, several members mentioned that they would value a symposium focused around assessment of civic engagement and community outcomes. Wagner College's BTtoP was introduced: the fact that we are assessing the connection between civic engagement and psychosocial well being; that team members represent a variety of departments within the college; the widespread discussion across campus constituencies; and the complete endorsement of this process by senior college administration.

The meeting attendees were stunned by the diversity of college stakeholders, and that fact that we, as an institution, were willing to transparently examine the effectiveness of our signature program, The Wagner Plan, which stands at the heart of our institutional mission. Most attendees remarked that they would never be able to so rapidly and thoroughly integrate this type of an initiative at their colleges. The general feeling was that their departments and leadership were so separated that it would take years of preparation just to create an environment connected enough to support this type of sweeping assessment. This has given our team a great boost of encouragement; we have enhanced our commitment to continued focused efforts to integrate this initiative within our institution.

8. Identify changes, if any, from the original proposal and/or obstacles encountered thus far.
   a. Briefly explain approaches or plans for addressing changes or challenges.

As data from different sources begin to build, the BTtoP team has realized that statistical support would be needed for Dr. Eshleman. We are hiring Katherine Pryor, a graduate student who has been instrumental in guiding the analyses of faculty and student responses to the Teagle grant survey during the 2010-2011 academic year. Since we are incorporating the Teagle results into our BTtoP initiative, Katie's experience and insight will be invaluable. She will also work with our new survey form software to develop a new scan survey form for fall 2011. Katie will begin on September 1, 2011. Other personnel changes at the College are discussed in item 11. They are temporary obstacles to maintaining progress on all items on our timeline.

9. Briefly detail implementation of assessment plans and/or any data collection activities to date.
   b. Describe plans and/or timelines for data analysis and reporting of findings.

Year 1:

- ○ Distributed civic engagement survey, with psychosocial tools included, in both fall and spring semesters. In the process of analyzing results.

- ○ Administered BSSE and NSSE. Results for NSSE will be sent to Wagner College in August.

- ○ Administered CORE and Quality of Life surveys.

- ○ Administered first round of the Alumni Survey to 2466 alumni, with questions pertaining to civic engagement included. Will resend the survey after Labor Day to those who have not yet responded.

- ○ Community partner interviews continue year-round.

- ○ Assessed our capacity to create a scan-ready survey form for the complex and widely distributed civic engagement survey; purchased special software and a scanner to increase our capacity to process hundreds of completed surveys at one time.

We now have the results of multiple assessment tools to conceptually integrate, including the recently analyzed data from our 2-year, Wagner College-Belmont University grant project, funded through the Teagle Foundation. This project, *Learning By Doing: Assessing the Relationship Between Liberal Learning and Experiential Education*, has a strong assessment component, one facet of which includes a student survey with questions identical to those in the civic engagement survey. As a part of the analytical process, we will assemble a faculty team composed of social scientists and health professionals to review and discuss the findings. These discussions will then move to conversations with the broader campus community to continue the dissemination and meaning-making process. These discussions will be an important step to our understanding of Wagner College culture and dissemination vectors, and will help establish an ongoing, sustainable examination of our mission, vision and institutional goals.

Year 2 (Proposed):

(Note: professional meetings are in italics, and campus-wide conversations are underlined.)

August-October 2011 -

- ● refine civic engagement survey to shorten and focus it

- ● create and test survey form using new scanning software purchased in spring 2011

- ● Katie Pryor will begin her work as statistical support to Dr. Eshleman and the team

- ● resend Alumni Survey

- assemble faculty team to review and discuss assessment findings
- coordinate surveys and access reflective writings from overseas experiences

October and November 2011 -

- "Integration Celebration" discussions with faculty
- Lunch and Learn presentation as part of the Center for Teaching, Learning and Research
- *Presentation at Atlantic Center for Learning Communities retreat*
- introduce Alumni Survey results to the team; begin conversations around "connectedness" as it pertains to alumni
- Administer new civic engagement survey to students
- Integrate Residential Education into the discussion to help disseminate findings and elicit responses from students living in residence halls.

January 2012

- *AAC&U Presentation*

February-March 2012

- Introduce findings to the Academic Policy Council and Learning Community faculty
- Campus-wide dialogs (including students) around "connectedness," the Wagner Plan experience, the role of civic engagement and psychosocial well-being on campus

May 2012

- First Year Program Faculty Retreat discussion

In addition, but as yet unscheduled:

- Disseminate results to New American Colleges and Universities (NAC&U) consortium at annual institute in June, and at other points.
- Propose presentations at other professional conferences, possibly disciplinary, student affairs, or assessment conferences.
- Submit article(s) about BTtoP project to professional publications.

- Organize a regional roundtable and campus symposium.
- Schedule national speaker(s) for faculty development.

10. What have you learned about the relationship between civic engagement and psychosocial well-being?

We are just now beginning to consolidate the results of multiple tools, however some preliminary results are shared below.

<u>Student responses according to the type of experiential learning</u>

Faculty were asked to estimate the percentage of experiential learning done in various ways: service learning, field trips, participatory learning (more like participant observation), community research, or other.

- Experiential learning with a higher percentage of service learning was associated with less of a sense of connection to the community partner.
- Experiential learning with a higher percentage of field trips was positively related to:
  - seeing links between the community partner and learning outcomes
  - a sense of connection to the community partner
  - social well-being
- Experiential learning with a higher percentage of participant observation was positively related to social well-being.

<u>Student responses regarding other aspects of experiential learning</u>

- High levels of faculty-led orientation to the experiential learning were associated with lower perceptions of links between community work and learning outcomes (level of community partner-led orientation to the experiential learning did not predict student responses on the survey).
- High levels of faculty members accompanying students on the experiential learning were associated with a greater sense of connection to the community partner.

Although the survey results showed many positive correlations between social well-being and aspects of experiential learning, and between psychological well-being and aspects of experiential learning, more analysis is needed to determine the nature of the relationships.

Results from the 2010 Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE) suggest that Wagner students are more involved and more optimistic than students at other private or masters' level institutions. For example, among Wagner students, 50% of entering new first-year students were "very involved" or "highly involved" in community service or volunteer work in high school (55% of females, 39% of males). These are much higher rates of community involvement than students at other institutions:

private institutions, all students - 40% (female - 46%, male - 29%)

masters' institutions, all students - 34% (female - 40%, male - 25%)

Similarly, on the question "during the coming school year, how certain are you that you will stay positive, even when you do poorly on a test or assignment?" 66% of Wagner students responded with a 5 or 6 on a 1-6 scale, with 6 being "very certain" (63% of females and 73% of males.) On the same item, students at other institutions scored lower:

private institutions, all students - 56% (female - 55%, male - 58%)

masters' institutions, all students - 57% (female - 56%, male - 59%)

We have yet to correlate these data when looking at our measures of well-being. On the Civic Engagement survey to be given to Wagner students in the fall of 2011 we are planning to include some items from the BCSSE so that we can cross-tabulate answers from these questions with responses to specific questions about the type of civic engagement in which students are involved.

11. What have you learned about the implementation of sustainable institutional change processes?

The past year at Wagner saw numerous personnel changes that impacted the progress of our work on this project. The Provost was departing (announced in December, last day in office in June), the Associate Dean for Experiential Learning was departing, the Faculty Fellow for Teaching, Learning, and Research changed mid-year, the Registrar left in April, the Director of the Center for Intercultural Advancement (CIA) left in June, and the faculty member who coordinated the Intermediate Learning Communities left in June. Not everyone was leaving, as the position of Dean of Integrated Learning was added in January, and a new Provost and a new Director of the CIA have just started in July, but more than in recent years, personnel changes have been a challenge to sustaining institutional change.
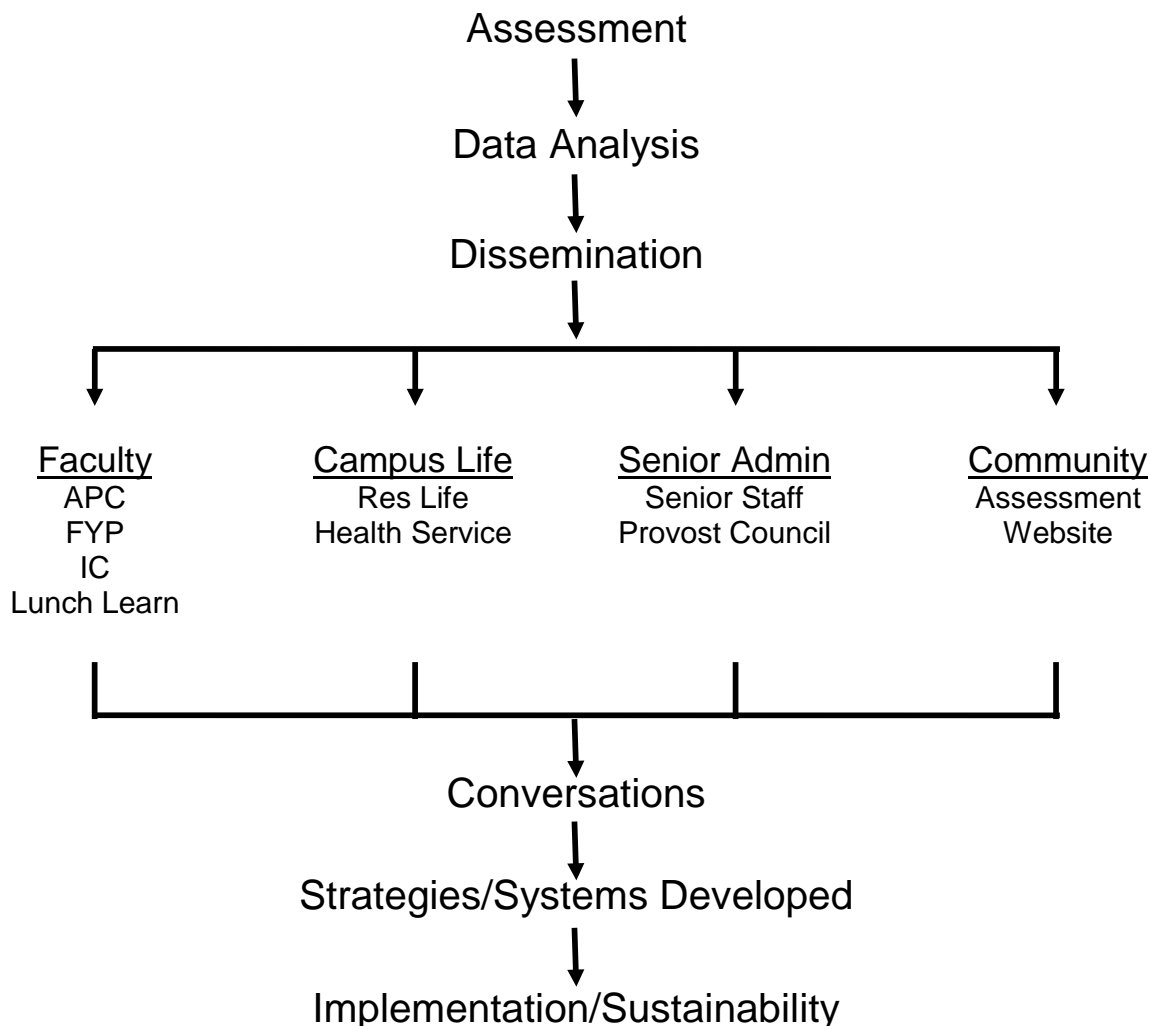
Lessons learned include the importance of accessibility of data and other information; written policies, guides, or manuals for administering programs; communication across offices; and making hard decisions. While these are fundamental business practices and stating them here may seem glaringly obvious, in an atmosphere of change, reorganization, and/or competing priorities, these practices are not always adhered to. Making change sustainable requires that a foundation of solid, disciplined, and organized behaviors be maintained.

    a.   <u>Accessibility of data and other information</u>. Data and other information (survey questions, records of communication with people on and off campus, financial record details) need to be saved in a location that is secure and accessible to multiple individuals. Data, once recorded electronically, cannot be held on a single computer. Supervisors need to know where data and other information are kept, and they need to be able to access it.

    b.   <u>Written policies, guides, or manuals</u>. Too often we rush out of meetings without documenting the decisions reached, or the action items needed and who the responsible person will be. Taking the time to write things down and record them in a location that is accessible to others is important for effective and efficient functioning.

    c.   <u>Communication across offices</u>. In times of stasis and change, communication across offices is important for organizational functioning!

    d.   <u>Making hard decisions</u>. Personnel changes may not be easy but they may be necessary. Prolonging a personnel change can result in uncertainty about who is supposed to be doing what. In the case of the BTtoP project, there was uncertainty about the hand-off of responsibility for some of the survey administration and data analysis. This has been resolved but months were lost in the transition.

Other lessons learned involved helpful outcomes of the transitions that took place this past year. We needed to <u>re-examine our assumptions</u> of who was doing what and how things were being done. With changes in personnel we were able to <u>realign some responsibilities</u>, <u>reinforce connections across departments</u>, and <u>see new opportunities for action</u>. For example, a complementary research/grant project that was being done in parallel may be able to reinforce the work of Bringing Theory to Practice. Surveys that were brought together once may be able to be streamlined more. We will need to reach out to new faculty members and administrators and involve them in the project, which should result in new energy and ideas being brought to the project.

12. What is your communication strategy? What is the message that your project team would like to communicate about the work you've been doing on campus?

The chart on the following page illustrates our plan for disseminating assessment results throughout the College, and eliciting feedback from multiple stakeholders.

Assessment

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Data Analysis

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Dissemination

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<u>Faculty</u>	<u>Campus Life</u>	<u>Senior Admin</u>	<u>Community</u>
APC	Res Life	Senior Staff	Assessment
FYP	Health Service	Provost Council	Website
IC			
Lunch Learn			

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Conversations

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Strategies/Systems Developed

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Implementation/Sustainability

Our communication strategy is to conduct a number of face-to-face events where the data will be shared and discussed. In addition, information will be distributed in print through various media – email, web, handouts at meetings. Dissemination will also occur at professional meetings and conferences.

Face-to-face events are being scheduled for the fall semester, including two "lunch and learn" events (sponsored/led by the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Research), and two "Integration Celebration" events (led by the BTtoP project team). These will be opportunities for faculty and administrators to learn about the project, and to discuss the data, react to it, ask questions about it, and digest it. Discussions at these events will be folded into business meetings across campus, as appropriate. In this way, the work of the BTtoP project will be aligned with core campus directions and policies.

Dissemination is planned/projected at the following professional meetings; more venues will be explored and proposals made in the coming months.

- · Atlantic Center for Learning Communities, curriculum planning retreat, Oct. 2011 – poster presentation
- · NYMAPS, regional meetings in the fall – presentation
- · AAC&U Annual Meeting, Jan. 2012 – proposal for presentation submitted

The message we will be communicating (one of the messages) is that we make meaning out of our data by discussing it in community, and drawing conclusions about alterations to/improvement of our teaching practices as a result. As we do more data analysis we will know more about our messages regarding experiential learning and student well-being.

13. Attach a financial report which summarizes project-related expenditures. If there are significant changes from proposed budget, please include a budget narrative.

There have been no significant changes from the proposed budget (spreadsheet attached in separate document).

The majority of our publication costs were directed toward our national assessment survey tools. Our national assessment survey tools for Year 1, originally budgeted at $1000, were expanded to include 3 standardized assessment tools to give a broader perspective of our data. In Year 1, we have unencumbered funds totaling $15, 800. These funds are scheduled to be used in Quarter 1 in year 2. These include: Our campus symposium ($2400); faculty development related expenses for 5 individuals ($7400); an invited national speaker ($2500). Based upon our implementation of new survey software, we have delayed our regional round table until late in Year 2 ($3500).